

Virtual Reality: The World of Sexual Hyperreality

Nara Garini Ayuningrum¹, Achmedza Aziz Ghofar², Isrida Yul Arifiana¹, Nadia Aulia Ferlinda¹

¹17 Agustus 1945 University, Surabaya, Indonesia

²Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This study explores the phenomenon of Virtual Reality Pornography (VR Porn) and its influence on the construction of sexuality in the digital era. Grounded in Jean Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality, the research examines how VR Porn shapes sexual preferences, expressions, and the commodification of sexuality. Utilizing a qualitative approach with a netnography method, the study analyzes user interactions and comments on the Pornhub platform to understand the dynamics of consumption and engagement with VR Porn. The findings reveal that VR Porn not only mediates virtual sexual experiences but also fosters unique expressions of intimacy, potentially altering perceptions of reality and physicality. This technology contributes to a simulated experience that feels more authentic than reality itself, shaping how users perceive and experience sexuality. Furthermore, the research highlights the dual nature of this technology—offering immersive experiences while posing risks of self-isolation, distorted intimacy, and the commodification of sexual interactions. These insights contribute to broader discussions about media technology's role in reshaping cultural and sexual paradigms, emphasizing the need for critical reflection on its social and ethical implications.

Keywords: *Virtual Reality, Pornhub, Hyperreality.*

Corresponding author

Name: Nara Garini Ayuningrum

Email: naragarini@untag-sby.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

Sexuality, from time to time, is a pillar of the practice of life. Sexuality coexists with warfare, language families, and food preparation in shaping human civilization. The human biological body outwardly forms the construction of sexuality. Starting from genitals, reproductive processes, to sexual behavior. Freud's psychoanalysis even states that human behavior is based on the desire for sexuality, which is the first experience in the birth process. Furthermore, sexuality goes beyond the physical and reaches the realm of affection, psychological, moral, and spiritual. Narratives and images about sexuality are contained in classical literature, hymns, abstract paintings, and even holy books. In the development of human culture, these images of sexuality are often referred to as pornography. In other words, pornography is an expression in the form of writing or

painting about erotic life, with the aim of causing sex to those who read or see it (Abdullah, 2006).

The creative space of pornography then participates as a passenger in the pace of technological and media development. Hawkins and Zimring (1988) noted the role of technology in triggering reactions to the use of pornography in the 1970s and 1980s, as the development of film and videotape technology became a major milestone of change for the pornography industry. Nowadays, viewing pornography is as straightforward as access to other entertainment videos. This factor cannot be dismissed as a consequence of internet technology. The internet space provides the means to connect people to each other. It allows for the exchange of sexual fantasies and romances, which were previously private or only existed in the mind of one individual, to be exchanged, embodied, expressed, and of course, shaped for movement. Phenomenologically, there are at least three categories that sell well on the internet, namely gambling, sexual preoccupation, and social networks such as email (ScienceDirect, 2014). In a report by The New Yorker, 2016, it was mentioned that some porn sites have more traffic to access than news sites such as CNN.

The cacophony of contemporary pornographic imagery has sparked specialized terms such as Cybersex or Digisexuality. In brief, these terms are used to describe the process of sexuality that is interconnected and mediated by internet networks and a series of specialized technological equipment to support the process of sexuality. Furthermore, this study will not discuss the intricacies of the meaning of the terms Cybersex and Digisexuality. Instead, it focuses more on discussing one of the Digisexuality products, namely Virtual Reality Porn, to examine the phenomenon of pornography in the contemporary era. Virtual reality itself is defined as a digitally constructed representation of a natural or artificial environment (Loomis, Blascovich, & Beall, 1999), where real life is formulated in digital space (Fox, Arena, & Bailenson, 2009). It then offers a seamless presentation of the virtual space (Slater & Sanchez-Vives, 2016). To relate it to the phenomenon of Digisexuality, this Virtual Reality technology was chosen because of its recent development and popularity to be discussed. Since 2015, Virtual Reality pornography has been available online by companies such as Valual Real Porn which has been developed using 360 stereoscopic cameras (Simon, 2019).

The intensity of the presence of pornography is an important phenomenon that day by day requires more attention and strategic actions are needed for understanding, for approaching the problem, and for careful resolution (Abdullah, 2006). Pornography is perceived to cause sexual desire (Hald, Malamuth, & Lange, 2013), and can be defined as an emotional experience (Fromberger, 2015). This is based on cognitive processes that can be disrupted by external stimulants (Anderson & Hamilton, 2015). In the 1980s pornography was still in the form of stencil books containing pornographic stories that were sold and distributed at bus terminals and on intercity buses (Abdullah, 2006). The quote suggests that the euphoria of pornography is formulated in three aspects: production, distribution and exhibition. Subsequently, the internet has encouraged the growth of a variety of sexual materials (Holmes, Tewksbury, & Holmes, 1998) and changed access to sites that distribute sexual images and interactions (Waskul, 2002). The cut-off by the internet proves that

pornography is no longer difficult to produce, unhindered in distribution, and widespread without being segmented.

The practice of using technology for various sexual functions that was previously considered inappropriate in society, has in recent years grown more common and more acceptable (King, 1999; McArthur & Twist, 2016). Meanwhile, perspectives on pornography consumption as an expression of sexuality are potentially addictive with substantial clinical and health implications (Kraus, Voon, & Potenza, 2016). Physiologically, the effects of pornography are linked to the mesolimbic reward system (Wightman & Robinson, 2002), leading to increased dopamine release (Kelley & Berridge, 2002; Wise, 2002). Neurological studies show the involvement of neural structures related to the strength of sexual desire (Georgiadis & Kringelbach, 2012). In short, sexual arousal as an initially neutral stimulus, has the potential to mediate future sexual behavior (Christian, 2012), which certainly cannot be separated from the impact of digisexuality. At the social level, moral damage, sexual perversion, and a decrease in human quality are inevitable implications in the problem of pornography (Abdullah, 2006). From time to time, pornography has surfaced as a debate on norms and ethics. Stalking closely from this, the development of technology and media began to be highlighted as a simalakama, a double-edged knife.

The term “virtual reality” was popularized by Jaron Lanier, founder of The Visual Programming Lab (VPL) in 1987 (wired.com). The development of this technology then went beyond the realm of gaming applications and sparked interest in other visual disciplines, such as therapy to theme park installations. Over time, virtual reality technology began to be adopted by the pornography industry, complete with streaming sites for users (Wood, 2017). Virtual reality environments are fully projected through a three-dimensional computer or from multiple viewpoints with 360 stereoscopic exposition conceptualized as a subjective experience for the user (Simon, 2019). While wearing a Virtual Reality headset, the user can then move the head or even walk so as to view the scene well from multiple perspectives (Schubert, 2001). The combination of stereoscopic presentation of visual scenes with Virtual Reality goggles can give a sense of participation in the scene. This is a fundamental change for the pornography industry (Krueger, 2017; Rubin, 2018). As a result of real positioning, the 3D stereo display, and its total field of view, is enough to convince the user's brain to be truly present (Lewis, 2016). Dynamic materials in virtual reality give a different and better effect compared to the conventional consumption experience in 2-dimensional visuals,

Some studies then propose how subjective experiences and physiological reactions to consuming pornography through Virtual Reality glasses can reduce external distractions (Conradi & Alexander, 2013) and lead to an increase in actual stimuli (Janssen et al, 2000). The impact of using this technology is somewhat controversial, on the one hand the perception of reality or interaction is fostered (Fromberger, 2015) and on the other hand it triggers emotional cases such as a sense of security that can be avoided from the surrounding environment, and can also feel alienated from the real world (Slater & Sanchez-Vives, 2016). In clinical research, for example, an approach using virtual reality-based therapy can cure impotence and premature ejaculation (Optale, 1998), as well as the

presence of sexual arousal that can be increased related to emotional aspects (Doresetal, 2015).

Hyperreality is one of Baudrillard's topics of discussion. This phenomenon can be described as the inability to distinguish between reality and fantasy (Croissant, 2006). Media and various information from communication technology have the ability to change reality and create what is called hyperreality (Nunes, 1995). According to Baudrillard, media representations can be seen to replace reality, with the effects of images mediated in such a way that they can feel more real to their users. Baudrillard describes the process of replacing the real with the virtual through the masses bombarded with images (simulation) or signs (simulacra) that replace real life and images of objects in the real world (Gane, 2004). This changes the way a person experiences the world. This fact makes it impossible for media users to make a critical and objective evaluation of reality.

All relationships are artificially created with the help of models produced by the system. Simulation that is more real than reality itself leads to the continuous duplication of reality and the creation of hyperreality. Simulation eliminates the principle of truth by pruning the original relationship between significance and signification (Pourgharib, 2018). According to Baudrillard, one of the things that captivates us in hyperreality is technical perfection. A case of hyperreality can often be described in the world of gaming. Game users can face war, struggle, and maybe even death, but on the other hand the game user remains safe and fine in front of the screen (Sloan, 2014). And it is this event that Baudrillard alludes to, that in hyperreality, feelings are authentic because of an experience, but it is not really reality.

The next generation of media and cultural theorists such as Guy Debord, Jean Baudrillard, Paul Virilio, and Umberto Eco, asserted that we now live in a world structure where communication and media create mass production of simulations, duplications, and replicas that have little to do with actual reality ideologically and instead become reality altering (Langman, 2007). A spectacular hyperreality.

Technology has disrupted the current state of affairs and created new spaces of communication. Our relationship with the world is replaced by virtuality, which is only controlled by some abstraction of time. Virtuality has the potential to destroy the deontological foundations of truth and reality (Kingsepp, 2007). Geophysical circumstances become unimportant to us; cyberspace becomes an important factor in which all reality, objects, people, and socio-cultural phenomena are accelerated (Virilio's concept of dromology) under the pretext of modern intelligence. Virilio examines the contradiction between the natural world and technically mediated representations implying that the overlap of the physical world with the virtual world can cause total human disorientation and is suspicious of becoming an absolute system of control over human existence (Sebikova, 2018).

In the following discussion, this study is then divided into three problem formulations to formulate what underlies the birth and development of the Virtual Reality Porn phenomenon, especially those found in the world's largest porn site network, Pornhub. First, how the concept of Virtual Reality Porn in shaping the universe of sexuality.

Second, the causes and consequences of Virtual Reality Porn technology that creates sexuality preferences and expressions. And third, the implications of Virtual Reality Porn technology that gave birth to the commodification of sexuality. To help understand these three problems, this study bases its approach on Jean Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality, especially as stated in the book *Simulacra & Simulation* (1994).

METHOD

This research will use qualitative research. The choice of research type is appropriate because in qualitative research, it is important to know the social context of the participants' behavior (Creswell, 2015). Beside that, this research use Netnography as analysis methods. Netnography is a qualitative research method adapted from traditional ethnography to study cultures and communities in online environments. Developed by Robert Kozinets (2019), it involves the systematic observation and analysis of online interactions, such as discussions, comments, and shared content, to understand social dynamics, cultural practices, and collective meanings within digital spaces. Netnography is particularly valuable for exploring how individuals engage with, contribute to, and shape online communities. In the process of analyzing this phenomenon, the study was conducted by accessing 3 Virtual Reality-based pornography videos with the largest number of viewers found on the Pornhub website. In 2015, it was known that internet users spent 4,392,486,580 hours on the internet watching porn on the Pornhub site, twice as long as the lifetime of homo sapiens on earth (tirto.id). In addition to analyzing the discourse around pornographic videos, the study also considers the responses or what users do in the comments column to see how far the comment content, interest, and involvement of users when consuming pornography.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

RESEARCH RESULT

Virtual Reality Porn & Hyperreality



Figure 1.

Source: www.pornhub.com

The pages on the Pornhub site provide a huge variety of VR Porn video types and genres, allowing users to choose videos according to their preferences. The display above shows an image or scene design set in one of the parts of the house in a conventional two-dimensional form. Distortion is visible when viewed with the naked eye, there is a superposition of two images on the same background, and some parts create a depression that juts inward. However, it will be 180 degrees different when VR Porn devices are used. Visual conceptualization with 360-degree projection allows users to more dissolve in the process. The two stacks of images will synergize visually, and the distortion of the basin will form a simulated design as if the user were in a space.

The concept of hyperreality carefully explains how VR Porn devices and their various visualizations make sense for the audience to develop and consume. The first idea came from the process of "deteritritualization of meaning", the development of media technology, especially in the noisy visualization which was initially awkward, gradually disrupted our conception of territorial boundaries and physical boundaries. The body as a physiological entity, which was initially a milestone in the identification of our identity, began to be replaced by representation through a series of media simulations. Body images are manifested with symbols, signs, icons, 'avatars' that are given wide space by media technology.

The abstraction and ambiguity of physical values that are constantly fostered by the media then triggered the second idea, namely "imaginary creation", the competition to mediate all kinds of objects, signs, languages, and physical forms of humans and nature continues to be carried out massively. In short, all aspects that cannot be formulated concisely in visual form will be considered obsolete. These points are accepted as ideas that are ultimately referred to as "representations of reality". In this case, VR Porn technology is a concrete example. Users are not crammed with questions between the threshold of fiction or fact, what happens is precisely how VR Porn technology continues to be massively represented by reality. On a physical level, VR Porn space provides accommodation for the nature of gestures, such as head point of view (PoV) projection that frees users to focus and explore specific viewpoints that the user himself wants. The use of special headset features also contributes to the impression of the atmosphere that is formed. Musical instruments, natural atmospheres, and dialogues make VR Porn technology users even more isolated from the real world. In certain cases, VR Porn technology provides mobility assistance to other gestures, not just the head. On an emotional level, the representation of reality from VR Porn technology such as graphics, design, narrative, and visual aesthetics is considered capable of embodying the conception, meaning, and desires of sexuality.

Virtual Reality & Sexual Expression



Figure 2.
Source: www.pornhub.com

In addition to videos that feature humans as the main object, the Pornhub site also provides a selection of animation-based VR Porn videos. This evidence also strengthens Baudrillard's statement that the concept of hyperreality ultimately does not use original references in its production process. Remediation also occurs in the types of videos found on the Pornhub site that are adopted in the setting, scenes, or characters of movies, television shows, or fictional stories such as comics and novels. This new interpretation of previous media content certainly enriches sexual preferences and expressions for VR Porn users on the Pornhub site.

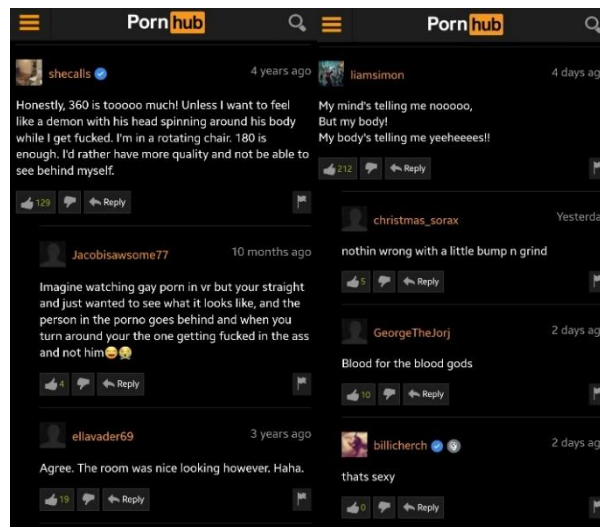


Figure 3.
Source: www.pornhub.com

Content analysis in the comment column of Pornhub is quite a concern in this study considering that the features on the Pornhub site accommodate the interaction and participation of its users (just like Youtube). The features on the Pornhub site also allow users to share their videos, in other words, the term Prosumer also takes part in the longevity of the site's network. Directly, the Pornhub site is felt to have created a virtual community through active communication between its users.

Interaction in the comment section of the Pornhub site that contains information related to an uploaded video can be a trigger for other users to explore more widely. The comment column can also be used as an indirect reference for a review of a video. The participation of criticism and appreciation from these users will be considered for updates to the technology on the site or the development of content variations. For example, on @shecalls account that tweeted, "Honestly, 360 is to much. Unless I want to feel like a demond with his head spinning around his body while I get fucked. I'm an an rotating chair. 180 is enough. I'd rather have more quality and note be able to see behind myself", which was liked by 129 site visitors and later responded by @ellavader69 account with the comment, "Agree, the room was nice looking however", showing the participation of critics and reviews when enjoying a 360-degree visual projection of VR Porn video content. While another review, @liamsimon account commented, "My mind's telling me no, but my body. My body's telling me yeeheees!!", which was also liked by 212 other site visitors. The comment indicates that the visuals of VR Porn, which initially experience rejection in the cognitive realm, then move a response in her body to convey sexual desires. The comments on the image above are a sign that behind the VR Porn phenomenon and its set of technologies, it also offers a reality simulation that gives rise to a separate sexual expression for its users.

Virtual Reality & Sexual Commodification



Figure 4.
Source: www.pornhub.com

Along with the development of the internet and visual technology, the pornography industry has become a space that cannot be underestimated. And it is being exploited by some porn sites massively. Pornography consumption continues to transform, from static images dominated by several well-known magazines such as Playboy, to moving images in the form of videos. But at this time, video imagery is considered using, and embedded as conventional because it still uses two-dimensional aspects. VR Porn has come to the surface as offering the most insightful pornography consuming experience.

In 2017, Pornhub released statistics showing that Virtual Reality Porn was one of the fastest-growing video categories on their site, averaging around 500,000 views per day in April 2017 (McArthur & Twist, 2017). Changes in conventional screen-based pornography consumption patterns can be used as an assumption that virtual reality experiences are perceived to be more stimulating and sexually satisfying for users. Pornhub itself offers two options for its users, the first is free access when visiting their site. Second, Pornhub offers a series of videos exclusively with visual aesthetics and content that is considered more voluptuous. Breakthroughs like this show that the Pornhub site is fairly on par with other subscription visual services such as Netflix or HBO. Various video content with a variety of sexuality topic options has also been adopted by Pornhub to perpetuate its supremacy in the pornography industry.

DISCUSSION

Virtual Reality Porn: The Sexuality Arena

Sociologist Amitai Etzioni (1977) affirmed with full conviction that any attempt to abolish pornography is tantamount to trying to eliminate sexual impulses. Some works indicate that pornography can improve a healthy sex life (French & Hamilton, 2018; Hald & Malamuth, 2008; McKee, 2007). But on the other hand, it is also known for some people, pornography consumption can be a compulsive or addictive behavior (Grubbs, Volk, Exline, & Pargament, 2015; Kraus, 2016; Reid, Garos, & Carpenter, 2011).

To study further, this study then tries to formulate what aspects contribute to and underlie the VR Porn phenomenon. First, is accessibility. Accessibility refers to the ease with which a person has direct access to technology for a variety of sexual functions at any time and is not limited to a variety of locations. This makes the internet network the foundation for obtaining access to the Internet. Second, is anonymity. Today's social media provides a method to protect anonymity that can free an individual to engage in sexual behavior in the virtual world. Delmonico (1997) writes that isolation, fantasy, anonymity, and cost are the main factors that perpetuate the sexual use of the internet. Anonymity can also present the user in any way they want and is protected from identification (Hertlein & Sendak, 2007). Meanwhile, Kath Woodward (2002) asks whether identity continues to require the body of an online communication framework that is textual and does not represent the visuality of physical life. towards the emphasis of the contemporary body projected on the screen through moving visual images (Rob Cover, 2016).

Third, it is accommodation. This is shown by VR Porn which continues to try to develop content on all sexual preferences. VR Porn accommodates a group of identities of various erotic orientations (dominatrix, obedient, sadistic), and relational orientations (polyamorous, polygamous, monogamous), as well as sexual orientations (e.g. gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual). This technology also provides access to sexual pleasure for people who have difficulty finding a human partner. Solitude increases pornography use, particularly among anxious individuals (Efrati & Amichai-Hamburger, 2019). In this case, VR Porn is expected to be able to be present for people with disabilities, who live in environments with uneven sex ratios, are in places such as same-sex bonding, sadomasochism (BDSM) is not recommended or prohibited, and also for those who have psychological problems or a history of sexual trauma.

The most cutting-edge step that VR Porn tries to accommodate is the projection of intimacy. As Baglia (2005) notes, intimacy has always served as a code for sexual relationships, as well as feelings, knowledge, and emotional relationships (Croissant, 2006). If the implementation of VR technology manages to get a combination of hardware, software, and sensory synchronicity, then it will achieve something known as a "sense of presence", where the subject really feels like a real presence (Renaud, 2002). In its development and efforts to make sense, VR Porn devices can create entirely new and immersive sexual experiences for their users that may never be realized to be done in the real world.

Virtual Reality Porn: The Shackles of Imaginary Space

Contrary to what Baudrillard said, we will arrive at an inability to distinguish between the real and the pseudo-reality. And this statement manifests itself in VR Porn products. This study tries to examine the impact of the hyperreality basin caused by VR Porn if it is not studied in cultural rules.

First, self-isolation. As Turcan said, the core of modern technology lies in its alienation from humans (Sebikova, 2018). In reality, VR Porn won't be perfect because it puts aside the affective aspect. Instead of expressing sexual desires, the constant consumption of VR Porn and self-isolation from the real world can have a misleading effect on the abyss of pseudo-reality. Second, mass confusion. Virilio's (1991) view of contemporary times says that world wars have long been declared and even greater than any other war, and that the first victim is truth. Meanwhile, VR Porn technology is artificially created with the help of a prototype model produced by the system for the purpose of commodity creation. And this triggers the fear of information landlords or computer-mediated panopticons (Virilio, 1991). Based on the above explanation, as a warning to deal with this VR Porn phenomenon, in 2014 the name Indonesia was included as the second highest country.

CONCLUSION

In the last few half-times, the entire global village is facing dynamic changes in the social, economic, cultural and moral spheres. Humans face a wide variety of features of expression and representation that affect the thinking of individuals and society. This makes the cultural space to continue to be discussed in the latest concepts and paradigms. Cultural response to technological and media disruption is the main key to accompanying the community's past practices. It is not tiring to emphasize that this is an in-depth study of the participation and contribution of anthropological studies.

The continuous mass production of visuals, sounds, and narratives ultimately leads to endless reproduction. Virilio (1991) shows paniciency as a mass phenomenon, a causality of our knowledge, consciousness, and perception of reality created by intermittent moments as a result of acceleration factors (dromology). Modern humans are lost in the real world where they cannot control the dimension of spacetime, so they no longer know the circumstances, causes, and real consequences of their decisions.

As Baudrillard (1994) said, simulators are constantly striving to make the real ones fit their models. Technological advances also make our senses unreliable and boring and not really objective in seeing reality. Real reality and experience have been replaced by hyperreal models and simulations, and our reality has become non-existent. Virtual culture has made us accustomed not to have direct physical and emotional interactions, all of which are concise to mediate. In its development, VR Porn technology can trigger the presence of other hyperreality products, for example hologram technology. In the realm of cinema media, imaginary products that are directly in contact with human life have been proposed in the films *Blade Runner 2049* (Denis Villeneuve), *Ready Player One* (Steven Spielberg), and *Robocop* (Paul Verhoeven). Baudrillard (1991) says that hyperreality always offers utopian seductions about perfect bodies, superhuman abilities, allowing all things within the reach of the medium. However, all of this actually became simalakama and turned into a dystopia.

The series of events above forces us to contemplate the meaning of the body, the physical, the distance, the space, and the time. It is not impossible, on a longer level, that the deconstructive nature born in the hyperreality of contemporary media attracts in-depth discussions for thinkers on the philosophy of empiricism, existentialism, and rationalism. The epilogue of this writing is a quote from Virilio (1991), that without a doubt we have become heirs and descendants of our fearsome predecessors. Offspring that is not transmitted through genes, sperm, or blood, but through technical contamination that cannot be prevented.

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